Defense Acquisition University

Enhancing Critical Thinking through Creation of Learning Organizations within the Confines of an Overarching Mechanistic Organization

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Report Documentation Page

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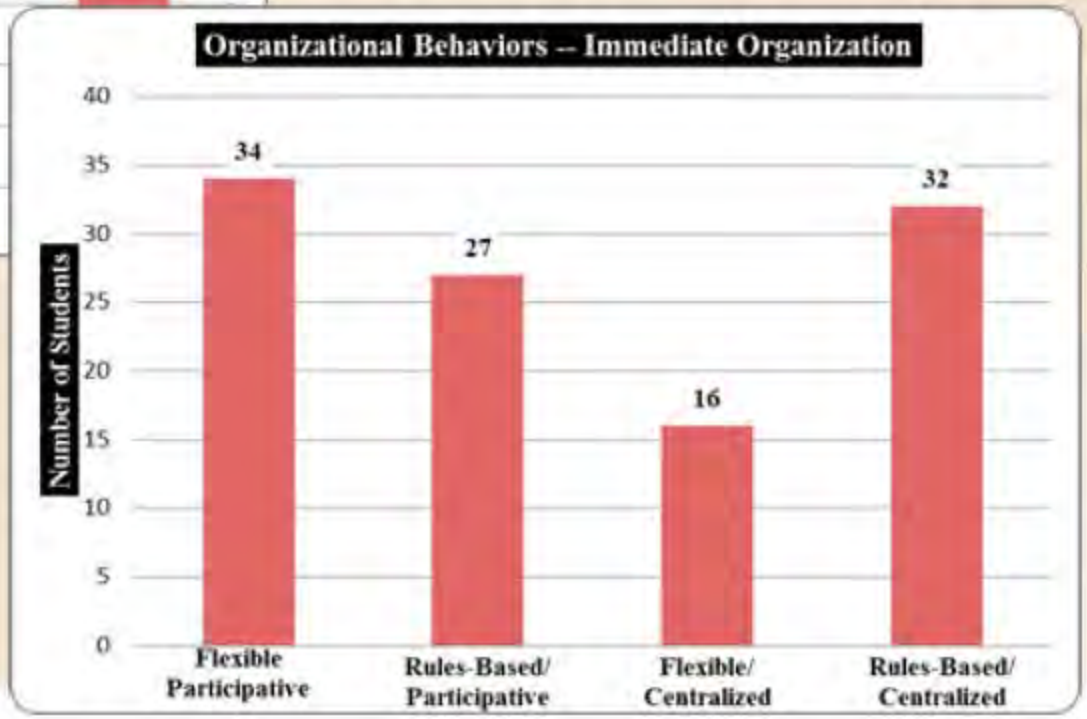
DoD as a Mechanistic Organization

- Characteristics of a mechanistic organization
  - High levels of hierarchical structure and control
  - Clearly defined roles and responsibilities
  - Written policies and procedures
  - Specialized, standardized tasks
  - Centralized decision-making processes
  - Higher efficiencies through lessened variation and improved predictability
  - Restricted innovation, flexibility and creativity
- History
  - Frederick the Great of Prussia
  - Frederick Taylor's scientific management
  - SECDEFs Robert McNamara and Donald Rumsfeld
- Calls for change
- Today's acquisition workforce
  - 2014 Acquisition Policy Survey report
  - Acquisition Workforce Questionnaire

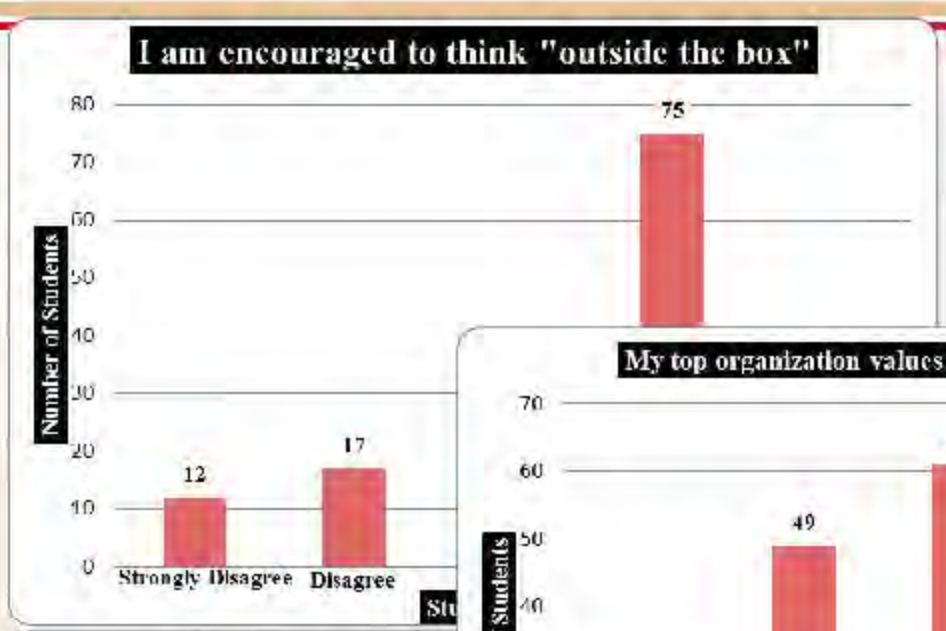
Organizational Behaviors

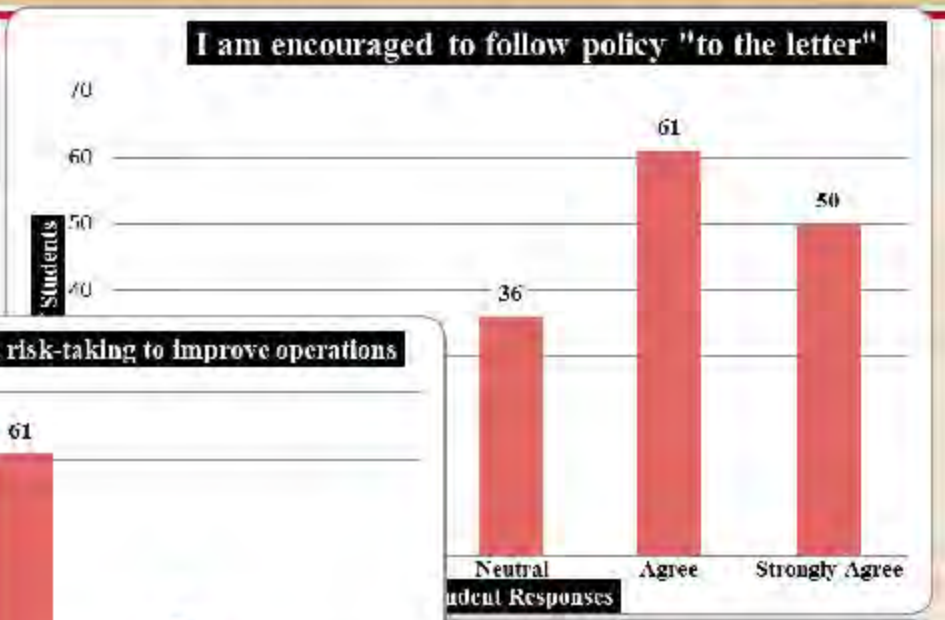
-- Survey Results --

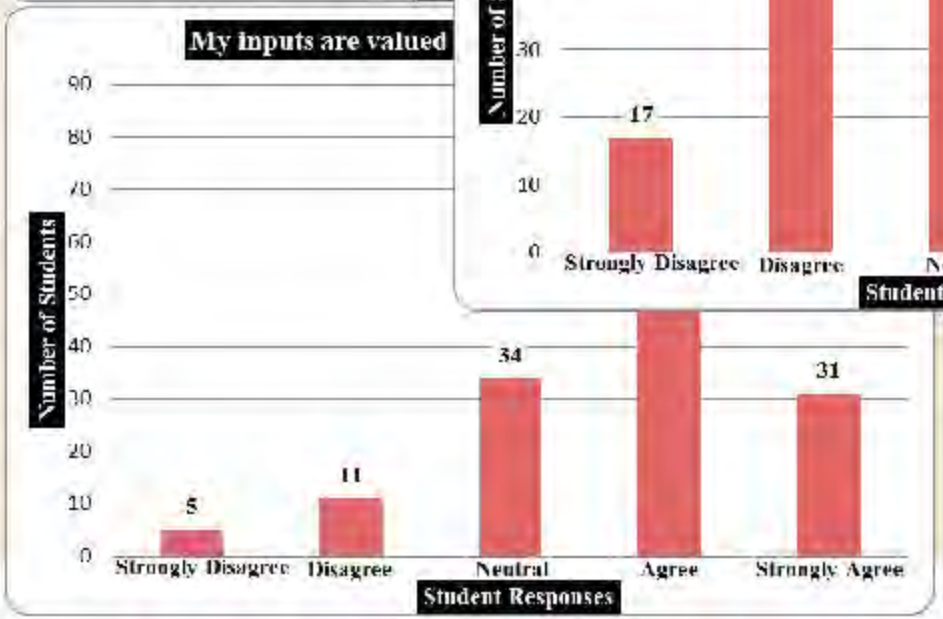


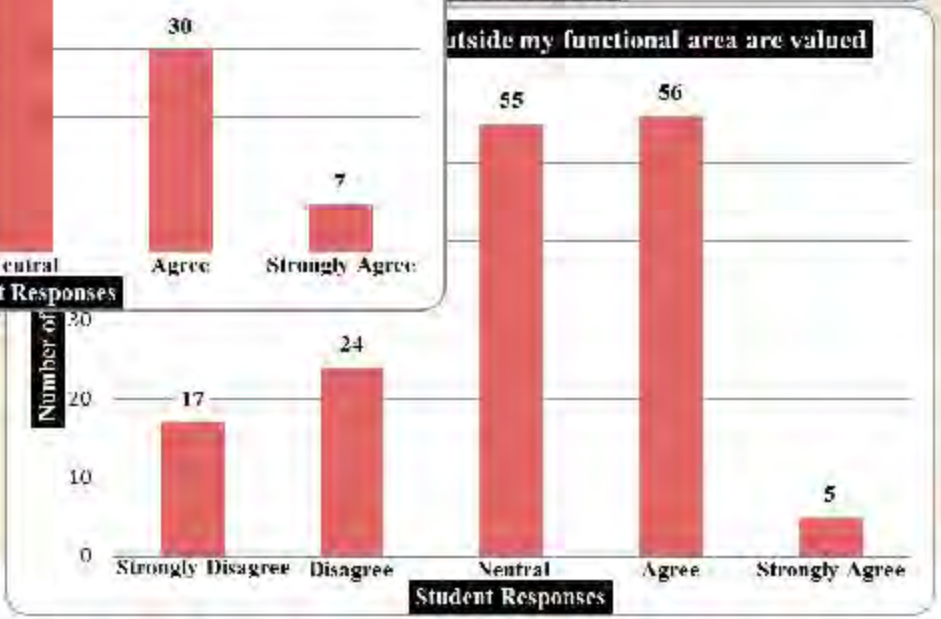
Five Distinct Questions

-- Survey Results --



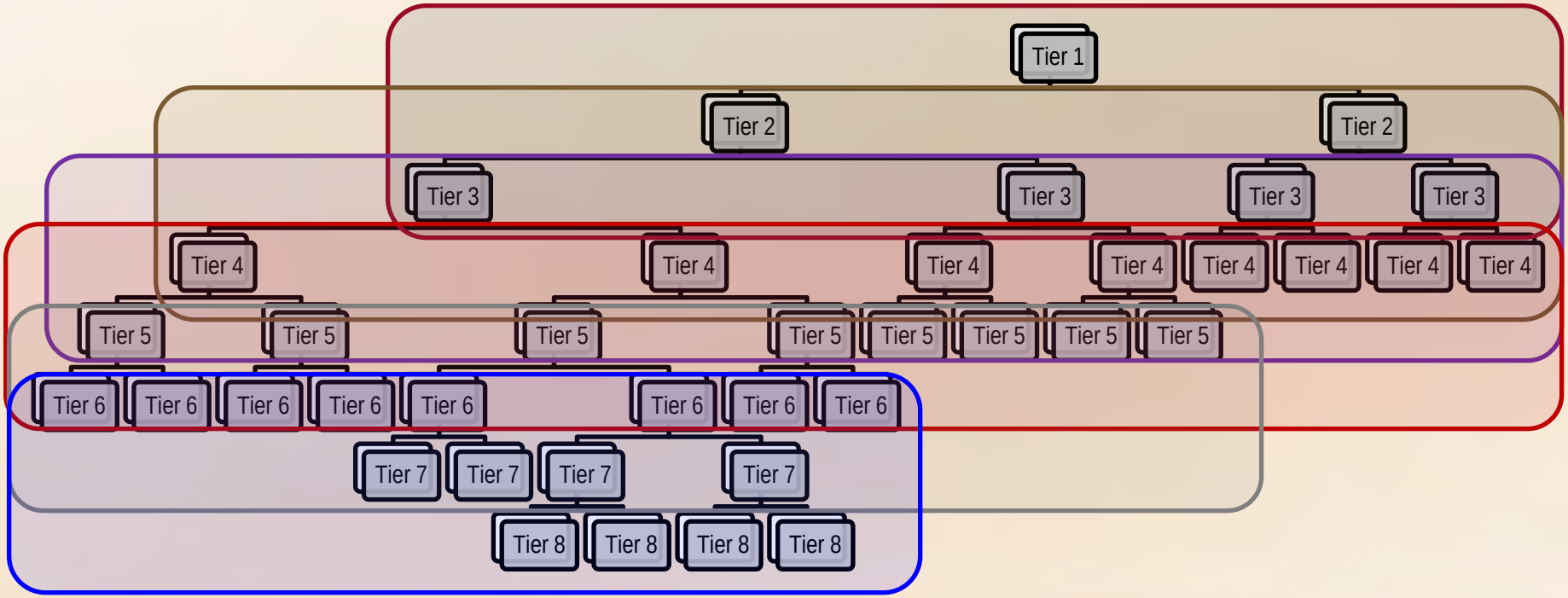






Layered Learning Organizations

- Retaining overall mechanistic organization construct
  - Use of policies and statutes as tools versus obstacles
  - Age and size of DoD
- Why not build a layered learning organization within the construct of an overarching mechanistic organization?



Learning Organizations

- Characteristics of learning organizations
  - Little to no hierarchical social structure
  - Free flow of information to encourage new ways of doing business
  - Continuous improvement of established procedures
  - Change and risk taking supported
- Advantages of learning organizations
  - Maximum flexibility
  - Dynamically responsive to changes in the environment
  - Learns from mistake
  - Adapts to new realities more readily
  - Better decision-making in non-problematic situations, i.e., innovation
- DoDI 5000.02's new "framing assumptions"
  - Deepens learning from single-loop learning to double-loop learning

Adopting Learning Organizations

- DoD Cultural Change
  - Impractical to expect DoD as a whole to become learning organization
  - Develop a culture with low power distance and low uncertainty avoidance cultural value dimensions (CVDs) within each layer
  - Adopts America's cultural dimensions
- Requires change in cultural values and artifacts
  - Responsible risk-taking preferred
  - Failure acceptable
- Leaders need to incentivize the transition of the culture from one that desires hierarchical control to one that values innovation and encourages debate

Leadership Driven

- Autocratic leadership destroys double-loop learning
- Humility
  - Successful PMs readily admitted programmatic issues using honest, candid communication (2010 GAO Report)
  - Must be receptive to criticism and employees bearing bad news
  - Characterized by respect and a restraint of egotistical intentions
  - More apt to acknowledge need for help and extend trust
  - Leads to think open-mindedly -- acknowledging and evaluating alternate solution sets -- key sign of a well-cultivated critical thinker
  - Part 1 of “Level 5 Leadership”
- Professional Will
  - Part 2 of “Level 5 Leadership”
  - Focus on long-term goals
  - Must be coupled with ethical leadership
- Humility and professional will leads to organizational trust

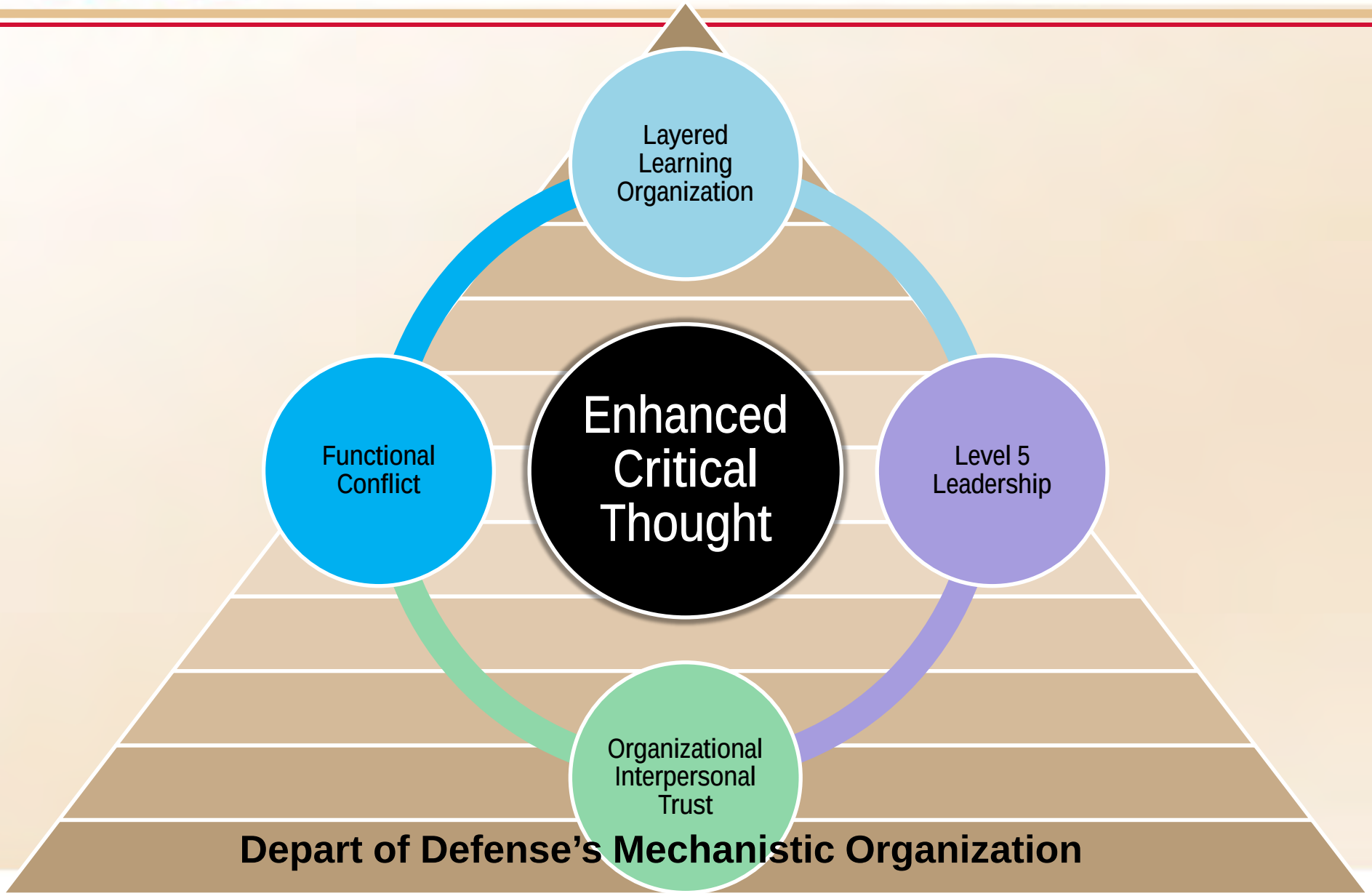
Organizational Trust

- Crucial for learning organizations
  - Driving force allowing employees to experiment and adapt to changing culture
- Must take the place of daily, direct observation of workers' efforts
- Factors for building trust
  - Abilities
  - Benevolence, i.e., good intentions
  - Integrity
  - Trust propensity
- Enhanced by DoD's high in-group collectivism CVD
- Hindered by DoD's high power distance CVD
- Ops units may require high power distance, but do acquisition units?
  - Supports DoD organizational characteristic of differentiation
- Leads to environment where critical thinking can be cultivated

Enhanced Critical Thinking

- Purposeful, reasoned, and goal-directed
  - Boils down to Socratic method of asking and answering questions, along with challenging assumptions
- Leadership must create atmosphere of reasoned questioning and active, respectful dissent
  - Hierarchical control limits critical thought as junior officers and civilians are reluctant to question their immediate supervisor or their supervisor's boss
- Functional conflict can be healthy and used as a change agent to drive growth in an organization
  - Requires foundation of interpersonal and organizational trust
  - Opens team up to new alternatives while taking all perspectives into consideration
  - Takes education and practice

Summary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Functional Conflict
Enhanced Critical Thought
Level 5 Leadership
Organizational Interpersonal Trust
Depart of Defense's Mechanistic Organization